

**GALERIE
LEONARD & BINA ELLEN
ART GALLERY**



**NOVEMBER 17, 2018 - FEBRUARY 23, 2019
VINCENT MEESSEN. BLUES KLAIR**

Curator: Michèle Thériault



Vincent Meessen, *21st Century, Discordia et K-Variable*, 2018. Courtesy of the artist. Photo : Paul Litherland/Lux Studio.

EXHIBITION FINAL REPORT

PROGRAMMING 2018-2019

Exhibition title: *Vincent Meessen. Blues Clair*

Curator: Michèle Thériault

Exhibition dates: November 17, 2018 – February 23, 2019

Opening: Saturday, November 17, 3:30 - 5:30 pm

EXHIBITION DESCRIPTION

Vincent Meessen is interested in History and in the construction of colonial modernity in the Western imaginary. Through a research process that is both systematic and speculative carried out in archives and on the ground, Meessen seeks to endow the document with a contextual agency. By linking it to people, objects and events whose intersection within a wide variety of media gives rise to new sensible experiences, the exhibition becomes a site for testing History in terms of the present. The resulting trajectories effectively skew received discourses, proposing rich transcultural and political rereadings and rewritings.

At the heart of the exhibition, is the projected film *Ultramarine*. Within a structure of layered textiles conceived in collaboration with designer Diane Steverlynck, blue is the chromatic, historical and discursive filter through which a performance by African-American poet Kain unfolds. The famed precursor of hip-hop in the late 60s delivers his “spoken word” as the Belgian percussionist Lander Gyselinck improvises to the flow of his utterances. Throughout the performance various historical objects—astrolabe, mappa mundi, automaton, textile, fresco, film stock—are juxtaposed to Kain’s performance props. They invoke affective retrospections on exile and belonging, slave routes and colonial trade.

These considerations connect with the figure and unfinished literary project *Blues Clair* by the late French writer and passionate critic of jazz and film, Patrick Straram who lived in exile in Montreal from 1958, after having participated in the Lettrist project alongside Guy Debord in Paris. Associating text with the archival document, Meessen weaves a narrative line both textual and formal interlacing these exiled figures. He also brings into the fold, the Sir George Williams Affair, the 1969 racial protest movement led by West Indian students at the University whose repercussions were to be felt all the way back to the Caribbean. The artist draws attention to the commonality of emancipatory movements from the past and by reigniting their signs and images, endows them with poetry.

Narratives and destinies obscured by History meet in the shared ground of the exhibition, where they mobilize and enter into a dialogue through the forms they take, their inhabitation of space, the sounds that circulate within it, and colour as a sensible lens for reading into the present.

Vincent Meessen was born in Baltimore, USA, in 1971, and lives and works in Brussels (Belgium). He represented Belgium at the 56th Venice Biennale (2015) with *Personne et les autres*, a collective exhibition with ten artists from four continents. Solo exhibitions include *Ultramarine*, Printemps de Septembre, Toulouse (2018); *Omar en Mai*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne, Paris (2018); *Patterns for (Re)cognition* in various iterations at BOZAR, Brussels (2017), Kunsthalle Basel (2015), and KIOSK, Ghent, 2013; *Sire, je suis de l’être pays*, WIELS, Brussels (2016), and *Mi ultima vida*,

An African Grammar After Roland Barthes, MUAC, Mexico City (2013-14). Meessen has also recently participated in the group shows *50 Years after 50 Years of the Bauhaus 1968*, Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart (2018); and *Gestures and Archives of the Present, Genealogies of the Future*, Taipei Biennale (2016). His films have been shown in museums among which Kiasma (Helsinki), MUMOK (Vienna), Museo Reina Sofia (Madrid), Lincoln Center (New York) and in film festivals including IFFR (Rotterdam), IDFA (Amsterdam), Image Forum Festival (Tokyo), FESPACO (Ouagadougou). Vincent Meessen is founding member of Jubilee, platform for artistic research and production. *Blues Klair* is the artist's first solo exhibition in Canada and the United States.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

OPENING | DIALOGUE BETWEEN VINCENT MEESEN & SYLVANO SANTINI

Saturday, November 7, 3:30 – 5:30 pm

Sylvano Santini is a professor in the Literary Studies Department at Université du Québec à Montréal. He teaches late semiotics, theories of the relation between text and image, and the avant-gardes. He is preparing a study on "cine-fiction," a term he coined to define the performative relation of literature to cinema. Researcher with Figura, centre de recherche sur le texte et l'imaginaire, he has organized and moderated numerous activities. He is co-editor of the recently published *Le cinéma de Marguerite Duras : l'autre scène du littéraire ?* and director of the cultural magazine *Spirale* and *Spirale Web*.

PERFORMANCE

Tuesday, November 27, 5:30 pm

Exilic Hope/We Don't Disappear
Harmony Holiday

Considering themes of absence, minor histories, and the black radical tradition as introduced in *Blues Klair* and the research methods they provoke, Los Angeles-based poet and choreographer Harmony Holiday has been invited to present a new performance working with audio and video archives that extend from, surround and inform her practice.

Holding the figure of the exile and the Uncle Tom archetype in mind, Holiday listens, looks, and responds to archives issued from the Black Arts. Approaching archives as spaces that demand and bait encounter, Holiday explores how improvisation opens to rites of passage and ritual, how dance and literature can revivify and chorus with this material, and how we owe embodied engagement to and are responsible for its generational wealth.

Could exile be what happens when exodus is deferred? How is it that some Black mystics go missing from the collective memory or really just vanish, as Albert Ayler and Henry Dumas did? Or as Sun Ra, Amiri Baraka, Abbey Lincoln, Billie Holiday, and Assata Shakur, among others, have. How can acts of mythmaking and reclamation reassemble their legacies, priming reception to and in face of their self-imposed aesthetic exile or just missingness?

Harmony Holiday is a writer, dancer, archivist, and the author of four collections of poetry *Negro League Baseball*, *Go Find Your Father/A Famous Blues*, *Hollywood Forever*, and *A Jazz Funeral*

for *Uncle Tom*, forthcoming. She also founded and runs *Afrosonics*, an archive of jazz and everyday diaspora poetics and *Mythscience* a publishing imprint that reissues and reprints work from the archive. She worked on the SOS, the selected poems of Amiri Baraka, transcribing all of his poetry recorded with jazz that has yet to be released in print and exists primarily on out-of-print records. Harmony studied rhetoric and at UC Berkeley and taught for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre. She received her MFA from Columbia University and has received the Motherwell Prize from FenceBooks, a Ruth Lilly Fellowship and a NYFA fellowship. She is currently working on a book of poems called *M a à f a* and an accompanying collection of essays and memoir entitled, *Reparations: Thieves Who Stole my Blue Days*, as well as a biography of jazz singer Abbey Lincoln.

LOCAL RECORDS

Tuesday, January 15, 5:30 pm

Between Chroniques and Mainmise, Felicity Tayler, E-Research Librarian, University of Ottawa

In this workshop we will embark on a comparative reading of *Chroniques* (1975-1978) and *Mainmise* (1970-1978), two magazines published in Québec during the later half of the Revolution tranquille. Through the 60s and 70s, Québec, as in other parts of the world, saw an explosion of magazines across the spectrum of the Left. Where *Chroniques* aligned itself with a neo-nationalist socialism in dialogue with an international Left, *Mainmise* was the principle counterculture organ for a global psychedelic consciousness-raising. If at first they seem to be at odds in their visual and textual language, it is also possible to read both magazines through a prismatic lens.

With the understanding that magazines are sites for imagined communities where authors and readers (who may never meet) can imagine affinities; this workshop approaches the magazine as local record, as a locale, recognizing that readers and writers often participate in more than one imagined community at once. Participants will be introduced to and discuss the politics of the Left at the moment of publication and engage with the magazines through different forms of "tracing" that incorporate looking, speaking, and mark making. These resulting traces will help inform means or paths of analysis other than a strict comparison of aesthetic, cultural, or political positions.

Felicity Tayler is the E-Research Librarian at University of Ottawa Library, with a PhD in Interdisciplinary Humanities from Concordia University. She has an exhibition practice that engages with the symbolic value of countercultural movements in Québec. Scholarly writing has been featured in anthologies and in *Mémoires du Livre/Studies in Book Culture*, *Canadian Literature* and the *Journal of Canadian Art History*.

TOUR IN ARABIC

Tuesday, January 22, 5:30 pm

Exhibition Tour in Arabic by Emma Haraké (MA student, Art Education, Concordia University) of the exhibition *Among All These Tundras*.

SCREENING

Friday, February 1, 9:00 pm

The New-Ark

Director: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) [USA, 1968, 25 min, num., VOA]

Right On!

Director: Herbert Danska [USA, 1970, 78 min, DVD, VOA] with The Last Poets (Gylain Kain, Felipe Luciano and David Nelson)

Presented as part of the public programs linked to the exhibition *Vincent Meessen. Blues Klair* at the Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery, this program brings together two films essential to the Black Power Movement, both newly restored. Shot guerrilla-style on the streets and rooftops of Manhattan, Herbert Danska's *Right On!* is a concert film featuring twenty-eight performances by legendary spoken word group and forerunners of rap, The Last Poets. Commissioned by the Public Broadcasting Laboratory in the wake of nation wide rebellions during the summer of 1967, poet Amiri Baraka's *The New-Ark* (1968) documents activity at the Black nationalist community center, Spirit House.

RESPONSE

Tuesday, February 12, 5:30 pm

Les lectures bâtarde de Patrick Straram, Sylvano Santini, professor, Literary Studies, Université du Québec à Montréal

Patrick Straram's own reading practice presents itself as an archive that, like his subjectivity, is characterized by bastardization. In effect, his readings express his personality, his intimate self, his own thoughts, a selfhood following Henri Lefebvre's Marxist thesis of the everyday: "to live critically." They appear in notes scattered throughout the pages of his published books where reviews of his various readings and citations from different sources are juxtaposed, as if on a screen, without apparent concern for their order. It is as if their presentation on the page corresponds to a rhythm of reading unique to his subjectivity, driven in bursts through feeling and self-critique. This lecture will attempt to show that the traces of Straram's readings, as manifested in his books, anticipate the writing practices of the netizen, as if he was a blogger before his time. Straram's readings, and resulting texts which have long ranked as bastards of the counterculture, represent an example of an ethic of archiving through self-narrative.

LECTURE

Wednesday, February 20, 5:30 pm

The cold war of the Jamaican minibus, the double-shocked Haitian motorcycle taxis, and other insignificant signifiers of the Caribbean

Romain Cruse, geographer, Institut Catholique Européen des Amériques, author of *Le Mai 68 des Caraïbes* (Mémoire d'Encrier, 2018)

In this improbable geopolitics, Cruse proposes to describe the Caribbean today through a tight framing, one that recounts recent history from below in an attempt to describe the whole through the detail in a near photographic approach:

1. "One and go!": The evolution of Jamaican politics as told through its public transport system.
2. The double shock absorbers behind Haitian motorcycle taxis have much to tell you.
3. "Ride till the bicycle bruk off," reflections on *slack* and the geopolitics of Caribbean music (Trinidad, Jamaica, Haiti)

Romain Cruse is a geographer and author of *Une géographie populaire de la Caraïbe* and *Mai 68 des Caraïbes*, both published by Mémoire d'encrier. He is currently professor and researcher at the Institut Catholique Européen des Amériques. A correspondent with *Monde Diplomatique* and *Questions Internationales*, he is the director of *Carige*, a consultancy specializing in applied geography. He lives in Fort-de-France, Martinique.

Presented in collaboration with Mémoire d'encrier and the Department of Geography, Université de Montréal.

PUBLICATION

A printed brochure featuring texts by Michèle Thériault was produced for this exhibition. The accompanying texts are available online on the gallery's website.

Ways of Thinking on-line versions are available via the Gallery's website.

PRESS REVIEW

Nicolas Mavrikakis, *Les arts visuels sous le signe de l'engagement*

<https://www.ledevoir.com/culture/arts-visuels/535141/les-arts-visuels-sous-le-signe-de-l-engagement>

Le Devoir, August 25th, 2018

Renée Dunk, *Exile, retrospection and black emancipation: a new exhibition opens at Concordia's Ellen Art Gallery*

<http://www.concordia.ca/news/stories/2018/11/13/Exile-retrospection-and-black-emancipation-a-new-exhibition-opens-at-Concordias-Ellen-Art-Gallery.html>

Concordia University, November 13th, 2018

La Galerie Ellen présente une exposition de Vincent Meessen

<http://www.wallonie-bruxelles.ca/fr/evenements/la-galerie-ellen-presente-une-exposition-de-vincent-meessen-ca>

Consulted December 20th, 2018

Chloé Lalonde, *Happening in and around the White Cube this week...*

<http://theconcordian.com/2018/11/happening-in-and-around-the-white-cube-this-week-7/>

The Concordian, November 20th, 2018

Katherine McLeod, *Performance | Harmony Holiday*
<http://wherepoetsread.ca/performance-harmony-holiday/>
 Where Poets Read, November 27th, 2018

Nicolas Marvrikakis, « *Blues Klair* »: avoir les bleus; broyer du noir
<https://www.ledevoir.com/culture/arts-visuels/542525/blues-klair-avoir-les-bleus-broyer-du-noir>
 Le Devoir, December 1st, 2018

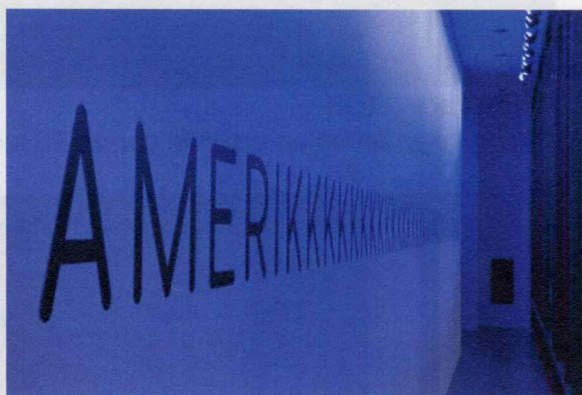
Michael Nardone, « Vincent Meessen »
<https://canadianart.ca/reviews/vincent-meessen/>
 Canadian Art, Reviews, February 21st, 2019

ATTENDANCE

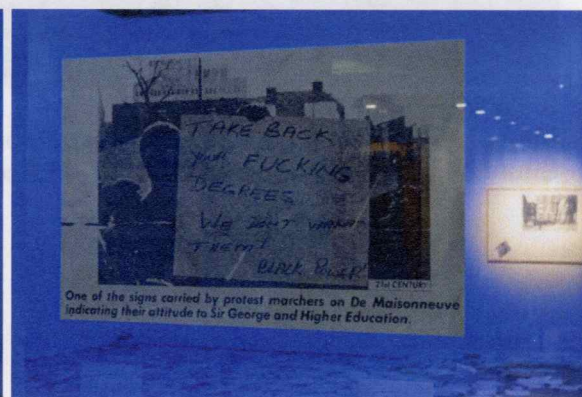
Number of days open to the public: 61
Total exhibition attendance, including events and public programs: 3098
Total exhibition attendance, excluding events and public programs: 2571
Total attendance for public programs and special events: 527
(Public programs 190 + tours 337)

DOCUMENTATION & LIST OF WORKS

Documentation photographique Paul Litherland, Studio Lux © Galerie Leonard & Bina Ellen, Université Concordia, 2018

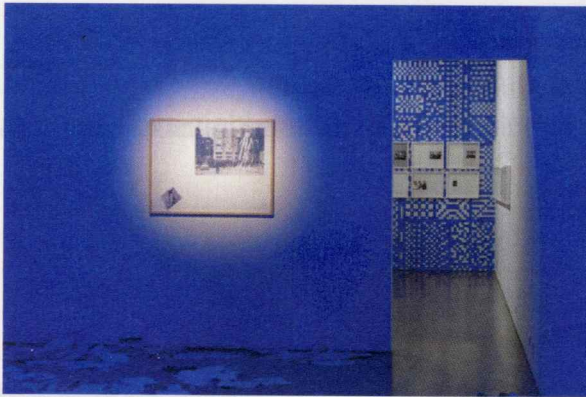


1. *K-Variable*, 2018
Vinyl lettering in Belgika font, 30.962 x 1136.908 cm



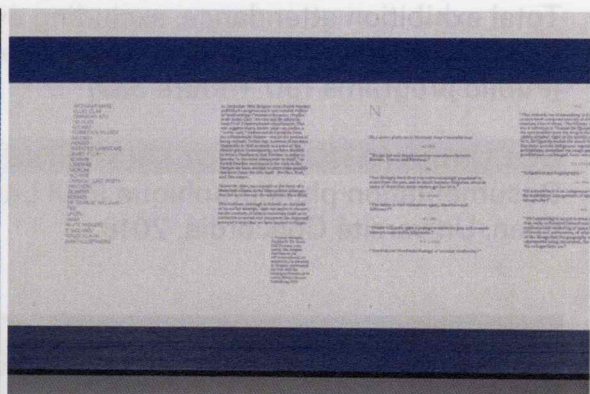
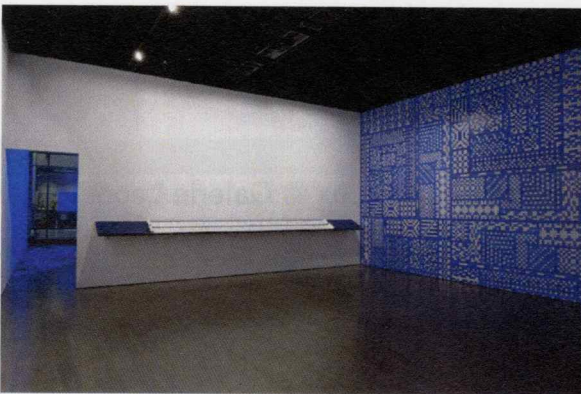
2. 21st Century, 2018

Digital inkjet print printed on blueback paper, 76 x 119.4 cm



3. *Discordia*, 2018

Digital ink jet prints on archival and photographic paper, flyers, 76 x 100.2 cm



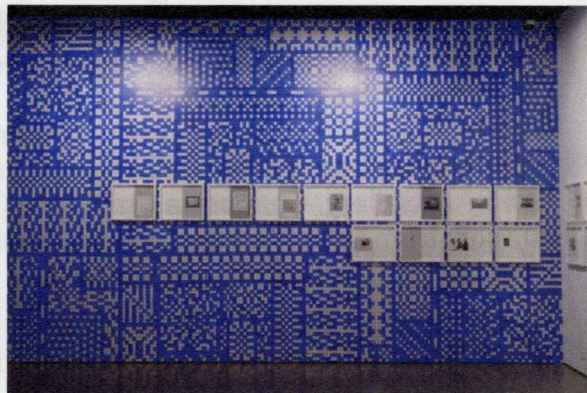
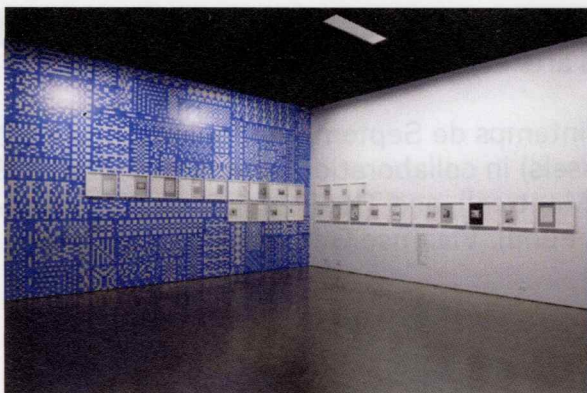
4. *Postface*, 2018

Digital inkjet prints on archival paper, 20 x 450 cm



5. *New Canadians*, 2018

Map of "None Shall Escape. Radical perspectives in the Caribbean by Fundi, Caribbean Situationist," 1973, reprinted in 1984, 41.8 x 29.5 cm



6. *Index*, 2018

Twenty-six digital inkjet prints on archival paper, 39.7 x 48.8 cm

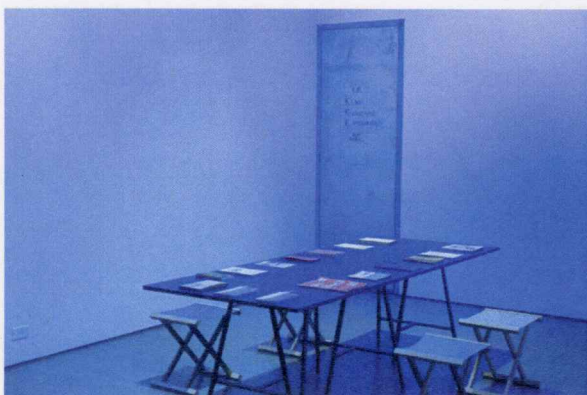
7. *Staram's Trama*, 2018

Drawing printed on vinyl



8. *Ultramarine*, 2018

Video and textile installation with sound
42 min. 46 sec.



9. Selection of Patrick Straram's books available for consultation

10. *Sans Issue*, 2018

Photograph printed on vinyl, 90 x 244 cm

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Canada Council for the Arts, Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec

Ultramarine was commissioned by Le Printemps de Septembre (Toulouse) for its 2018 edition. It was produced by Jubilee (Brussels) in collaboration with the Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery, Concordia University (Montreal), and The Power Plant (Toronto) with support from VAF (Flanders Audiovisual Fund), Vlaamse Gemeenschap and the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco.